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SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS

ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION'S SPECIFIC FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES TO THE WORK OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) believes that the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women are commitments of the State. One of the branches of the State, the Parliament, is an indispensable actor in obtaining the enabling legislation as well as the funds needed to carry out the programmes envisaged by national administrations to give effect to international agreements. Accordingly, IPU participated in the preparatory process of the Fourth World Conference on Women and contributed to it through various initiatives. 1/ It is now actively engaged in the follow-up to the Conference.

This activity to follow up the work of the Beijing Conference covers the various aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action, but IPU is giving priority to the part of that text dealing with women's participation in political life and the decision-making process. The follow-up of that part is carried out jointly with follow-up to two IPU documents, the Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life

adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council in March 1994, and the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration adopted on Parliamentarians' Day, 7 September 1995, in the Chinese National People's Congress. 1/

In addition to in-depth national action (regarding attitudes, education, political parties, electoral procedures etc.), the Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life envisages action at the international level, some aspects of which concern first and foremost women's participation in political life, while others concern the working of IPU itself.

I. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN CONCERNING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN GENERAL AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND PARLIAMENTARY LIFE IN PARTICULAR

Comparative surveys and studies

Building on the success of its previous comparative world surveys on women's participation in political and parliamentary life, 2/ IPU launched a new world inquiry in late 1995 on women's participation in political life designed to explore in more depth certain aspects of this question, which had already been taken up in its earlier work. The inquiry should lead to the publication in late 1996 of a world comparative survey focusing on women in political parties and the way in which the electoral process affects and benefits women.

Inter-parliamentary symposium on the theme "Towards partnership between men and women in politics" and round table with the media on "The image of women politicians in the media"

This symposium will be held in New Delhi from 10 to 14 February 1997 at the invitation of the Indian Parliament; the round table, a related event, will take place on 10 February. The agenda, timetable and working arrangements of the symposium were approved by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at the IPU meetings in Istanbul in April 1996. The comparative survey referred to above, the above-mentioned IPU Plan of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration will constitute the main tools for reflection for this meeting. In the context of the development of cooperation between IPU and the United Nations, it is planned to present the results of the symposium and the survey to the 1997 session of the Commission on the Status of Women as a special contribution to its debate on follow-up to the chapter of the Beijing Platform for Action concerning women's participation in the decision-making process.

II. FOLLOW-UP TO OTHER ASPECTS OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Besides being called upon to consider at its Conference themes covered by recommendations in the Beijing Platform for Action, IPU is henceforth attentive to the need to take account of the "women factor" in all its resolutions; women members of Parliament (MPs), who have succeeded in ensuring that any drafting

committee set up within IPU comprises a gender balance (rule 15 of the rules of the study committees), have agreed to take explicit action in this respect.

In addition, the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, the permanent consultation mechanism that has been operating in IPU for nearly 20 years, has decided to hold a twice-yearly general debate on national action to follow up the Beijing Platform for Action, and a specific debate at each session on one of the 12 critical areas of concern featured in that text. The activities described below have already been carried out or are scheduled to be carried out.

Overall national follow-up

At their meetings in Bucharest (October 1995) and Istanbul (April 1996), women MPs embarked on a discussion of the most effective measures to give effect to the work of the Conference at the national level. This has given rise to an exchange of views and experiences on legislative activities and various parliamentary initiatives, as well as information and awareness-building activities for the population at large. The discussion will be continued at future meetings of women MPs.

Women and the media

At their Bucharest meeting (October 1995), women MPs discussed the question "Media impact on the status of women: ways and means of shaping a fresh mentality towards women's status". As mentioned above, the image of women politicians in the media will also be debated during the New Delhi symposium.

Violence against women

At their Istanbul meeting (April 1996), women MPs reverted to earlier work (1991-1994) on the question of violence against women, and discussed the question "Organized violence against women". Following that exchange of views, a letter was sent in May 1996 to all national parliaments to draw their attention to the framework for model legislation on domestic violence drafted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Mrs. Radhika Coomaraswamy.

Poverty

At their meeting in Beijing (September 1996), women MPs will consider the following subject: "Poverty and extreme poverty: women as victims of this phenomenon and as key actors in its eradication".

III. ACTIONS CONCERNING THE WORKING OF IPU

Since September 1995, IPU has undertaken and completed two important changes in its own working that were advocated in its Plan of Action and that correspond to the spirit of the work of the Beijing Conference.

Revision of the statutes and rules to eliminate terms suggesting the superiority of one sex over the other

Conceived as a pedagogical exercise designed to change mentalities, this revision was specifically foreseen in the IPU Plan of Action. Amendments to the statutes and rules prepared between October 1995 and April 1996 were adopted at IPU meetings in Istanbul in April 1996.

Increased representation of women in delegations to IPU meetings

As from 1990, IPU statutes contain a provision for all parliaments that have women members to include at least one woman among the eight MPs (or 10, as the case may be) who comprise the national delegation to IPU meetings. After the Conference and as a means of supporting that provision and ensuring that it is respected, the Union's governing bodies asked the Secretary-General to prepare for each of the two annual statutory IPU sessions a comparative table showing the number and proportion of women in national parliaments in relation to their number and proportion in delegations to meetings organized by IPU. The first comparative table was produced on the occasion of IPU meetings in Istanbul in April 1996.

Notes

1/ The main initiatives of IPU have been:

(a) The preparation and adoption one and a half years before the Conference of the Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life, designed as a basis for the chapter of the Beijing Platform for Action dealing with women's participation in the decision-making process;

(b) As a contribution to the reflection of participants at the Beijing Conference, the publication of a comparative world survey, entitled Women in Parliaments: 1945-1995 and a colour-coded world map showing the number and percentage of women in the 178 national parliaments existing as at 30 June 1995;

(c) The holding of a Parliamentarians' Day in the Great Hall of the People of the Chinese National People's Congress, chaired by Mrs. Chen Muhua, Vice-President of the Standing Committee of the Congress and President of the Fourth World Conference on Women; 500 MPs from 102 countries took part in the meeting, which ended with the adoption of the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration;

(d) The organization in Beijing, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, of a round table on the complementarity of women's rights and children's rights, at which participants included MPs, government representatives, experts and representatiyes of non-governmental organizations.

2/ The most recent surveys gave rise to the following publications: Women and Political Power (1992), Women in Parliaments: 1945-1995 (1995), and a colour-coded poster, Women in Parliaments as at 30 June 1995 (fifth edition); the latter two publications were presented at the Conference.